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**Therapeutic landscapes of traditional
healing: building spaces of well-being
with the traditional healer in St. Louis,
Senegal**

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Therapeutic landscapes



- The ability of places to enhance well-being and help maintain physical and emotional health (Gesler 1992, 1993; Palka, 1999; Williams, 2002; Andrews, 2004; Conradson, 2005; Smyth, 2005)
- The role of places of everyday life in promoting well-being (Akiwenzie-Damm, 1996; English, Wilson, & Keller-Olaman, 2008; Gesler, 2003; Richmond, Elliott, Matthews, & Elliott, 2005; Scougall, 2002; Williams, 1999)
- Less consideration paid to:
 - traditional medicines and the production of therapeutic landscapes
 - relational dynamics (Conradson, 2005)
 - the patient–healer relationship (DeVerteuil & Wilson, 2010; Madge, 1998; Wilson, 2003)
 - therapeutic landscapes in the Global South (DeVerteuil & Wilson, 2010; Madge, 1998; Wilson, 2003)

Traditional medicines



- The total sum of the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illnesses (WHO/Regional Office for Africa, 2003, p. 1)

-Less attention paid to:

- the use of traditional medicine in urban settings
- cultural differences in shaping the relationship between health, place and identity

(Andrezejewski, Reed, & White, 2009; Dyck, 2006; Dyck & Kearns, 1995; Gesler, 1991; Rathwell & Phillips, 1986).



The research aims



- Address these deficiencies by exploring the role of the relational dimension of healing in shaping urban therapeutic landscapes of traditional medicine.
- Investigating therapeutic landscapes created by the interactions between patients and traditional healers in the city of St. Louis, Senegal.
- To accomplish this, particular attention is given to understand what people look for in the patient–traditional healer relationship, how this relationship is created and what benefits it brings to people.

The context: St. Louis - Senegal

- Partnership with the Interdisciplinary Research Group for Support of Regional Planning and Local Development (Girardel) of the University Gaston Berger of St. Louis
- The broader research: two year research project (Involving Italian and Senegalese: academics, master degree students, Ngos)



The research framework



OS1
Analyser les
politiques de santé
et les cadres de la MT

Coordination globale :
Elisa BIGNANTE, U. Turin
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OS2 :
les itinéraires
thérapeutiques et
les recours
spécifiques

OS3 :
Biodiversité et
Réseaux de collecte
et de distribution



Methods

-Overall, **160** people were interviewed: 100 patients, 20 herbalists (people selling herbal remedies in the market) and 40 traditional healers.

- Participants were recruited using **snowball** sampling

- **100 Patients:** from 15 to 70 years of age, 54 women and 46 Men, 39 literate and 61 illiterate, different occupations (teachers, sellers, farmers, pastors, housewives and some were unemployed), 78 Wolof; 14 Peul, 8 belonged to other ethnic groups, 63 Muslim, 22 Christian, 10 'traditional beliefs' and 5 didn't state.

- **20 Herbalists** and **40 Traditional healers:** all elderly men (between 45 and 70), Wolof, good reputation, 14 made a living from their healing activity; 26 had a second occupation, 12 literate and 28 illiterate, 21 Muslim and 9 practiced traditional beliefs, 9 of the 21 Muslims were Marabouts.



Results



- 80% of the interviewees self-medicated with herbal remedies for 'minor illnesses'
- 75% choose hospital/local dispensaries for major diseases
- At the same time: selective use of traditional healing practices
- These practices revolve around the figure of the traditional healer
- Traditional healer: a person who is trusted by the community he lives in and is able to heal using plants, animals, minerals and other methods based on social, cultural and religious practices.

(WHO/Regional Office for Africa, 2010)

Traditional healing

- Includes a wide range of practices (variously combined):

- medical plants
- mystical divination spells (Moch, etc.)
- massages
- amulets (Gris gris, etc.)
- religious scriptures
- conversation with the patients

-Marabouts also work in the field of traditional healing: often hard to distinguish their practices from those of traditional healers (Coppo & Keita, 1990, p. 83). Most traditional healers interviewed were Muslim

“the relationship between plants and Koranic verses can be compared to the relationship which binds mother and daughters: the plant is the mother, the verses are the daughters. There would be no children without a mother and you could not talk about family”



What do people look for when they visit traditional healers?

1. To treat specific illnesses successfully healed by traditional medicine (54 interviewees)
 2. Patients do not have enough money to pay for modern medicine (37 interviewees)
 3. Modern medicine does not solve their health problems (43 interviewees)
 4. To 'reinforce' the results produced by "modern medicine" (46 interviewees)
- 'modern medicine concentrates on eliminating the illness, while a traditional healer focuses on the causes of illnesses and the spirituality of the person, hence the need for a traditional healer'.*
5. To discuss personal matters. (39 interviewees)



Visiting the traditional healer



- People visit a traditional healer to deal with the 'profound causes' of their illness even when successful modern medicine therapies are available:

'modern medicine is able to act on the symptoms of an illness, but not on the causes'.

'if the profound causes of an illness (a spell, a precarious balance of the spirit or something else) is not taken care of, then the illness will come back'.

- These 'profound causes' involve discussing the patient's personal problems, fears and sadness, as the healer tries to find out why and how they affected the body.

The kind of help received during the encounters

- Feeling healed by the TH's words and herbal remedies (34%);
- Receiving protective amulets and prayers (15%);
- Receiving calming herbal remedies (10%);
- Letting every worry come out (12%);
- Being in a reassuring place (29%).



- Importance of TH-patient relationship in order to understand perceptions of caregiving and health care seeking decision-making

-In traditional medicine, 'healing occurs on a two levels: physical and emotional'

"sometimes patients come to me convinced they are sick because of someone or something, even if that is not the real cause of their illness my job is to listen to them, to share their feelings and at the same time to jointly find a cure".

Building therapeutic landscapes of healing with the TH

- Healers build around their patients a reassuring environment of prayers, songs, words, silence, secrets, massages and other ritual practices such as the khamb, herbal remedies, etc.

-The output of this physical and mental healing process is a therapeutic landscape that allows the patient to feel at ease and confident; it helps to mentally push him/her out of his/her sick state.

*'in that place [i.e., the traditional healer's room]
I feel reassured, it is more than feeling at home'*

'I feel protected and I know that I can be myself there'.

*'in that place you can talk and take medicines and pray
and you will feel better because it is the right place to be'.*



Conclusions: therapeutic landscapes of TM

-Therapeutic landscapes work as a metaphor to investigate how the healing process works itself out in places in terms of three (often overlapping) kinds of environments:

- physical
- social
- psychological/symbolic.

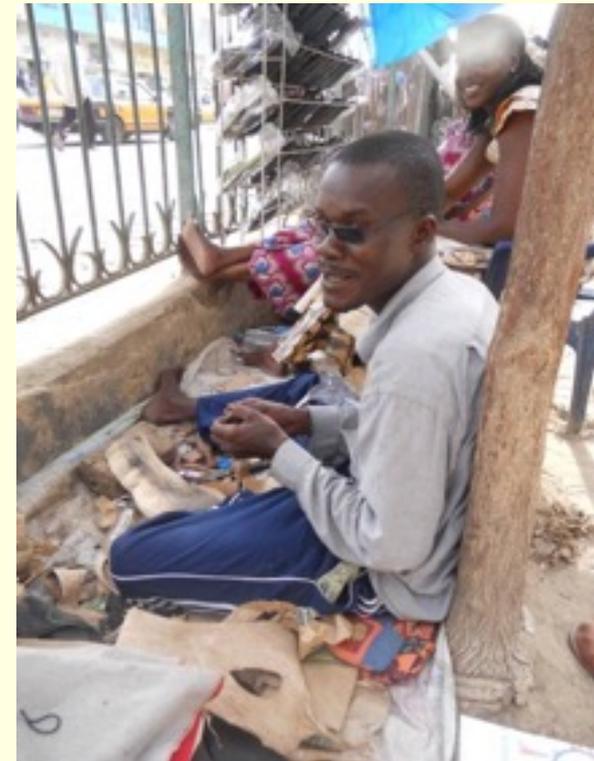
- These everyday places of well-being are not intrinsically therapeutic, but become so in relation to how people perceive and interact with them.

- The therapeutic landscape experience is best approached as a relational outcome, as something that emerges through a complex set of transactions between a person and their broader socio-environmental setting



Conclusions: Traditional medicine and the urban space

- Role and relevance of traditional healing practices in the urban space, not only in rural areas
- This calls for more studies to investigate the relational dimension of therapeutic landscapes in the urban setting and how they contribute to people's well-being



Conclusions: the urban policy level



- The effectiveness of therapeutic landscapes of TM: the ability to build physical, sociocultural and psychological ties between patient and healer.
- The relational dimension of therapeutic landscapes of traditional healing implies that we need a new approach to policies intended to integrate 'western' and traditional medicine.
- Urban health policies should move beyond the selective integration of herbal remedies into western medicine
- Instead include herbal remedies within broader all-round traditional medicine healing practices (Bignante & Tecco, 2013; Izugbara, Etukudoh, & Brown, 2005; Madge, 1998).